

# sex talk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

**wildfact** The testes can make up to 5,000 sperm per second.

## Q Where does sperm go if it is not ejaculated?

A. Each of 200 million sperm contained in just one ejaculation has a singular purpose: to reach and fertilize an egg. But what happens if they never leave a man's body, never even beginning the great race to the egg? The short answer is that they age, die, and are broken down to produce new sperm.

Although men produce the little swimmers in great numbers, they don't develop overnight. Believe it or not, it takes 74 days, on average, for sperm to mature – though some recent research suggests it could be as short as 42 days. During this time, sperm go through various stages of growth and development that takes them from the testes, where they are first produced, to the *vas deferens*, where they are mixed with seminal fluid and prepared for ejaculation. In between, sperm travel through the *epididymis*, a tube that is a mere 1/300th of an inch wide but 20 feet long, a journey that takes about 3 weeks to complete.

It is here in the *epididymis* that sperm wait “on-deck” until sexual activity spurs them forward to the *vas deferens*. Sperm can remain viable in the *epididymis* for about a month, after which they degenerate and are eventually reabsorbed into the body. Every time a man ejaculates, his semen contains both living and dead sperm, given this ongoing cycle. Animal studies have estimated that between 40-50% of all sperm that are produced wind up being reabsorbed before they ever reach the *vas deferens*. So now you know!

A few other interesting facts about sperm:

- Once mature, sperm can move forward at a speed of four times their length every second.
- Sperm get the energy to whip their tails from the sugar fructose.
- The ideal temperature to produce sperm is about 7 degrees Fahrenheit cooler than body temperature, which is why the testes hang away from body heat in the scrotum.
- A man produces sperm all day, every day, for his entire life.



**CAMPUS  
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Have a question? Send it to [sextalk@email.arizona.edu](mailto:sextalk@email.arizona.edu)

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